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## BOOK REVIEWS

*The American College.* By ABRAHAM FLEXNER. New York: The Century Co., 1908. Pp. 237. \$1.00.

This is a book whose significance is not grasped at a cursory reading; it invites close analysis, and though the first impression is distinctly pessimistic, there is disclosed in its pages an abundant idealism despite the unsparing criticism of college shortcomings. To many in the educational field it will probably prove uncomfortable reading, and even those not specifically arraigned may recognize wherein they too have contributed to the lack of pedagogical intelligence on which the author lays much stress. For while the central object of criticism is the college with its supplementary activities upward into the graduate school, and downward into the preparatory school, the secondary teachers have reason to consider themselves included in the list of ineffective guides. It is not merely a matter of phraseology to consider, as Mr. Flexner does, the college's influence all-potent throughout the preparatory public and private schools, and to designate the school as the subcontractor that is to deliver the necessary raw material in the right shape to the controlling stockholder.

Your reviewer is inclined to *distribute* the blame for this condition which Mr. Flexner charges exclusively against the college; the prominent leaders in secondary education could break, if they would, these bonds of a galling servitude, but it requires educational initiative, much concerted counsel, and abundant effort, to determine what type of instruction is most serviceable for the adolescent. It is unquestionably easier to follow along lines of endeavor definitely prescribed by others; and the colleges may not be so completely blameworthy, if, in the absence of expression of educational convictions from the leaders of the secondary schools, they undertake to formulate specific demands.

The school quite as much as the college is blameworthy for tolerating the identification of education with the passing of college-entrance examinations (p. 86), for permitting the pupil "to interpret education as synonymous with success in the fine art of passing examinations" (p. 100).

The judgments recorded in several of the main chapters ("The College and the Secondary School," "The Elective System," "Graduate and Undergraduate") represent an unusual combination of experiences. A man who turns after a long and successful career as a secondary teacher to graduate study in a large university views the efforts of the whole student body from an angle that no college officer can completely appreciate. It is just barely possible that in one respect Mr. Flexner sets his standards too high. He cannot quite accept the relentless fact that the serious and capable student should be the exception, the superficial, self-satisfied youth, the rule. He would have an ideal standard dominate the college. The rest of us know that the student body does not represent more than an average humanity. We must all admit that his characterization of the elective system "that furnishes the youth an abundant opportunity to exercise a low ingenuity in picking his way to a degree with the least

exertion" comes nearer to actual conditions than the fantastic claim of its advocates that it means "a rational choice of an ultimate controlling object."

In the illuminating discussion of the elective system the author makes a point worthy of special consideration: instead of promoting the social and civic relations that a liberal education might be expected to further, the elective system develops in fact indifference to social environment, and emphasizes individualistic tendencies.

To the main theme of his criticism, the pedagogical weakness of the American college, Mr. Flexner contributes his most abundant proof in his chapter on the "Graduate and Undergraduate." His picture of the hopeless confusion in teaching method, occasioned by the presence of three groups, capable graduates, poorly equipped graduates, and immature undergraduates in one and the same course, is recognized by every college officer as painfully truthful; the situation is at least as embarrassing to the instructor as to the student; if reasons of economy are responsible for this incongruity, the revelation must stimulate to measures of reform. A frank, almost ruthless setting-forth of objectionable features, such as this book offers, will arouse many college authorities to the seriousness of the situation; some of them even before its appearance have grasped the difficulties, and are least of all inclined to take offense at such honest criticisms.

The final chapter, "The Way Out," the purely constructive part of the book, may not satisfy the general reader; it is merely a stimulus, an attempt at positive suggestion. It is valuable above all in its emphasis of the teaching function in the college proper, and in insisting upon greater definiteness in the presentation of college courses upon rational organization of the subject-matter.

Ten years hence, after the criticisms involved in the earlier chapters have borne fruit, it will undoubtedly be possible to offer more distinctive measures of reform; the final chapter may then be reconstructed along lines of broader significance; the conscience of the American college officer will co-operate with Mr. Flexner in his desire to improve upon existing conditions.

JULIUS SACHS

TEACHERS COLLEGE  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

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*Mind in the Making: A Study in Mental Development.* By EDGAR JAMES SWIFT. New York, 1908. Pp. x+329.

The scope of educational psychology is broad and there are many points of view from which it is legitimate to approach any one of its manifold subdivisions. This volume is a series of essays on education from a broadly psychological point of view, that of the individual psychology of the learner rather than that of vague general principles supposed to underlie the educative process. On the whole it is very well written and extremely suggestive, even though the psychologist may feel that some of the statements should be accepted with reservations.

That "straight psychology" is not immediately profitable for the teacher has become increasingly apparent in the last few years. This should not be taken to mean that psychology as such should not be studied by the teacher, but rather that, inasmuch as the science of education is a fairly determinable field with its own peculiar problems which may be legitimately investigated on their own